

What's a Desert?

Field Program
Teacher's Version
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revised 03/21/00 and 1/10/01

- Grade:** Kindergarten and First
- Subject:** Elements of the Mojave Desert
- Theme:** By using all of our senses we can explore the diverse collection of wildlife found in the Mojave desert.
- Goal:** For students to learn about the diversity of a desert ecosystem.
- Objectives:** Students will be able to identify at least three desert animals.
Students will be able to identify at least three desert plants.
Students will explore elements that make up a desert.
- Curriculum:** (1) 2.1 Observe and compare familiar plants
(1) 2.2 Observe and compare familiar animals
- Materials:** "Roadrunners and Lizards" game instructions
"Roadrunners and Lizards" true and false statements
- Background:** Although at first glance the desert seems to have little in the way of wildlife, it actually contains large diverse populations. The desert environment may seem an unlikely place for animals and plants to thrive or even exist. However, desert plants and animals have adopted to their environment, and each fills an important niche in the desert ecosystem.
- By using all five senses (sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell) we can explore the desert. When we pay attention to all senses our awareness of our surrounds is greatly increased. The Mojave desert has special smells, like the Creosote bush. It has special sights, like the Joshua tree. Sounds of birds can be heard and many plants can be eaten. And we can't forget not to touch the spines of the cactus!
- Vocabulary:** desert: an area of land that receives very little rain fall
burrow: a hole in the ground made by an animal
habitat: a place where a plant or animal lives in nature
detective: a person whose job is to gather evidence

During your program the students are all going to become detectives. They will have to use their senses to figure out exactly what a desert is, including what plants and animals live here. Activities will include searches, hiking, and art/vocal communication projects in the Visitor Center and outside around the Visitor Center.

Pre-site: Before your program at Red Rock please discuss all five senses. The theme of the program is that all students will be detectives trying to discover elements of a desert. The investigations require that they use all their senses so it is very important that all the students are familiar with them. After discussing the senses play the game "Roadrunners and Lizards." An activity sheet is enclosed.

On-site Activities:

INTRODUCTION: Welcome the students to RRCNA. Ask them what they know about a desert.

DETECTIVE: Prearrange for somebody to help with the program. This person will be the detective. There is a Sherlock Holmes hat and large magnify glass that should be used as a costume. Arrange for the "detective" to walk into the room after the kids have been seated for about 5 minutes. The detective should first look around the room with out saying anything. Look at the kids, look out the window, etc. The conversation should follow:

Ranger: Excuse me. Who are you and what are you doing?

Detective: I'm a detective. They tell me there's a desert up here. I'm trying to find it.

Ranger: Well you're in the desert right now. You are actually in the Mojave desert.

Detective: The Mojave Desert? I don't know about that. Are you sure?

Ranger: Well yes. Its my job to help educate people about the desert and we are definitely in the Mojave Desert. Actually all of Las Vegas, over to California, and even north of here is the Mojave Desert. If you don't believe me ask the students here from ---- school.

Detective: Do you guys know about this desert? Do you think you could help me investigate the area? I'm looking for things like a joshua tree, burrow, tortoise, a cactus. I'm going to go start investigating. I'll meet up with you later and we'll share information. (Exit detective)

Five Senses: Talk to the group about 5 different senses. Explain that we are going to help the detective by using our five senses. That way we can tell the detective as much as possible. There are posters to aid in explaining the senses.

Divide the teams into three different groups: Team Scooby Doo, Team Blues Clues, and Team Inspector Gadget. Have the students get with their chaperone. Put necklaces on the kids. Make sure everybody in the group is on the same "team". Give each chaperone a clipboard and pencil with the sheet to write down ideas/experiences the kids have. Get everybody settled back down and explain that it is going to be their job to explain to the detective what the desert is like in terms of the sense(s) on their necklace. Explain to the chaperones we are going to need their help. We are going to be doing quite a few activities and different groups of kids are going to be heading in different directions. They need to find as many things that fit into these categories as they can. That way when the detective comes back they can explain that to her/him.

One group will go outside using the "Plants and Animals of Red Rock Canyon" game. The second group will stay and work with the Touch Table. Then all groups will meet again in Friends room for Poster drawing activity.

Touch Table, Taste Test, and Poster Drawing: Have the children line up at the touch table and move along it touching, smelling, tasting items that are lined up. Items include fur samples, rocks, antlers, horns, grass, pine cones, seeds, and cactus samples. Or you could have children sit in small groups and pass items amongst the groups. Then ranger discusses with children what items are, how animal survives in desert through their use.

The second activity is the "Plants and Animals of Red Rock Canyon" search and find game. Give each student a game card and pen. They must stay in their group and find everything on the card. Once they have found everything have them report to the area with the ranger. The ranger will discuss the different animals and plants.

The third activity is the poster drawing. There will be an area set up where each of the groups will get a chance to create a poster for the detective. The poster should focus on the sense(s) that they are responsible for. The purpose is to help the detective figure out what is a desert.

The Detective is Back! Once all the groups have been coloring for a little while have the detective come back. Have everybody that is on Team Scooby Doo stand at the front of the room. Have the detective find a seat. The group should share their posters and say what a desert looks like. Then have Team Blues Clues and Team Inspector Gadget do the same.

Conclusion: The ranger should thank everybody and ask if the detective has enough information to solve the mystery. Invite the kids back to Red Rock.

Roadrunners and Lizards

- Objectives: List two true statements about deserts.
- Materials: Playing field
True and False cards
- Subjects: Language arts, physical education
- Skills: Listening, psychomotor skills
- Method:
1. Write statements about deserts, some true and some false.
 2. Divide your group into two equal teams, the Roadrunners and the Lizards.
 3. Line up the two teams facing each other, about two feet apart.
 4. About fifteen feet behind each team draw a home base line.
 5. Read each statement. If the statement is true, the Roadrunners chase the Lizards, trying to tag them before they reach their home base line. If the statement is false, the Lizards chase the Roadrunners. Anyone caught must join the other team.
 6. Continue playing till all cards are read.

True and False Statements for Roadrunners and Lizards

1. You live in the desert. (T)
2. The desert gets lots of rain. (F)
3. It sometimes gets very windy in the desert. (T)
4. The plants and animals in the desert are very special. (T)
5. Bears and alligators can be found in the desert. (F)
6. Roadrunners are a type of bird that lives in the desert. (T)
7. The desert is always hot. (F)
8. The only plants that grow in the desert are cactus. (F)
9. The desert tortoise has a hard shell to help protect itself. (T)
10. The desert tortoise can crawl out of its shell. (F)
11. The best time to see flowers in the desert is Spring. (T)
12. Snakes live under every rock in the desert. (F)
13. Red Rock Canyon is an area in the desert where you can go hiking. (T)
14. Mountain bighorn sheep are animals that climb up and down the rock faces of the mountains. (T)
15. Scorpions crawl around the desert during the day. (F- only at night)

You may make up more statements if the students are having fun and their attention is still on the game.